

Women strike twice in Hamilton

Wellington's women's hockey team has put its more fancied rivals on notice with a comprehensive double in the national hockey league's opening weekend in Hamilton.

Black Sticks striker Niniwa Roberts scored a hat-trick in the 4-2 win against Midlands on Saturday, while Nichola Brydon bagged three in the 5-1 thrashing of Auckland yesterday.

Wellington coach Chris Leslie was naturally delighted with the flying start considering they finished seventh in the eight-team competition last season.

"Prior to coming here I thought Auckland would be pretty strong," Leslie said. "The first half both teams played reasonably well and it was quite tight (2-1 at halftime) but we pulled away in the second half which was pleasing.

"To come away with maximum points from the weekend was just superb."

Leslie said the side's pre-season focus on structure had paid off, with the set moves and penalty corners practised in training being executed under pressure.

"I was really pleased with our structure. We were able to exert a lot of pressure on the opposition circle and create a number of opportunities from penalty corners. And the fact we didn't concede too many goals was superb as well."

Australian international recruit Teneal Attard and captain Suzie Muirhead had combined "very well" in midfield, Attard shining in her first start in Wellington colours.

"She's a class act and brought some real stability to our midfield," Leslie said.

"She's good on the ball, she's got the ability to throw nice passes, set up our strikers, so she fitted in extremely well and is a really good team person actually."

Leslie was expecting rival teams to "sit up and take notice" after the eye-catching performances.

"Before the weekend we weren't mentioned at all and to be fair I don't mind that.

"It's very, very good to start off on that note and now the secret is going to be to maintain the momentum for the rest of the league."

Meanwhile, Wellington men's coach Peter Miskimmin was "satisfied" with a win and a draw from their opening two games.

Wellington drew 2-2 with Midlands on Saturday before edging Auckland 2-1 yesterday.

Drag flick exponent Matt L'Hullier rescued the defending champions with a late equaliser against Midlands and fellow youngster Stephen Jenness scored a crucial goal, his first for Wellington, against Auckland.

"They're doing really well," said Miskimmin of his talented young brigade, which also includes Blair and Jason Hilton, Joel Baker and Scott Barnett.

"It's certainly a big jump up for a lot of them in terms of the tempo and the pace and intensity but that's what the weekend was all about."

The action shifts to Wellington this Saturday with both teams playing Central before backing up against Canterbury in Christchurch on Sunday.